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YOUR MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY LOOKING FORWARD TO 150TH BIRTHDAY

Much has changed in Montana since the Montana Historical Society was founded by the First Territorial Legislature on Feb. 2, 1865.

As we approach the 150th birthday of MHS, there is much to look back on and much more to do to honor and celebrate our shared history and heritage.

MHS is the oldest such organization in the West and one of the most respected. Those who came before us have always known this is a special place. We owe it to the past to build for the future.

We, the 15-members of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees, share a vision and a responsibility to continue to tell the Montana story to all those generations to come. The trustees are appointed by the governor under state statute with overlapping terms of office, and we come from different political, social and economic backgrounds from all across the state.

We all agree that investing in the proposed new Montana Heritage Center as the new home for your Montana Historical Society is the right thing to do now and for the future. The Legislature currently is considering providing major funding for the new Montana Historical Society. With your help and the help of your elected officials the new home for Montana history and heritage will be an invaluable foundation upon which to build a better future for our people.

Most of us are familiar with Montana's Museum that tells the more than 10,000 years of known history of this great land. The new Montana Heritage Center would provide a beautiful and expanded venue to tell that story using the great MHS collections of archives, art and artifacts. It will be a bright and welcoming face for Montana.

As trustees we have learned that MHS is much more than that and reaches out in countless ways to serve the history and heritage needs of every corner of our great state.

The MHS Outreach and Interpretation Program provides educational resources, public programs, teacher workshops and classroom tools across the state. It provides about 150 public programs each year, including the annual Montana History Conference that is moved to different locations across the state each year. It also produced the Montana History textbook being used across the state. Perhaps most importantly, its services – including tours of Montana’s Museum -- help hundreds of students each year become better citizens by learning about their history.

The MHS Research Center and Archives is home to millions of archival documents, more than 500,000 historical photographs, maps, books and business and government records that are all accessible to the public. It also has 95 percent of all of the newspapers ever published in Montana. It truly is Montana’s Memory.

The MHS State Historic Preservation Office works with communities, tribes and property owners across Montana to assess and preserve the historic integrity of our special places and sites. It is home to the National Register of Historic Places. Not only does it keep Montana heritage alive from Main Street to remote homesteads, it also draws tourists and increases local development.

The MHS Press and Publications program publishes the nationally award-winning “Montana The Magazine of Western History” and publishes two to three new books on Montana history annually with over 65 books in print. The most recent release is “Mining Childhood: Growing Up in Butte Montana, 1920 to 1960.”

Hundreds of people across the state use and benefit from MHS services each day. We have seen the joy on the faces and the excitement in the voices of those from young to old as they discover their own special parts of Montana history.

The benefits to our history and heritage are evident, but we also realize that the Society's services and support are a major factor in the ever increasing tourism sector of local and state economy. The new Montana Heritage Center will allow us to continue to expand and meet ever increasing demands for our services to all of Montana, border to border.

The Montana Heritage Center would be located just north of the State Capitol Building and be connected to the existing MHS building, which would be remodeled, by a concourse under the street. We have spent several years developing this plan with public and private architects and designers. We have worked hard to make it as efficient and economical as possible as well as user friendly.

We encourage you to support this project and talk to your legislators about why you think it is important that they support the project. This isn't just about the past, it is about the future. We owe it to those who have gone before us to continue to honor our heritage. They were thinking of us, and we must think about all those who will follow us. Building the Montana Heritage Center is the right thing to do, and now is the right time.

■ The Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees President Steve Lozar, Polson